DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 453 JC 900 302

AUTHOR Paquette, William A.
TITLE Integrating Skills into the Teaching of World Civilization.
INSTITUTION Tidewater Community Coll., Portsmouth, VA.
PUB DATE May 89
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Skills; Book Reviews; Community Colleges; Curriculum Design; *Curriculum Development; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Library Instruction; Map Skills; *Non Western Civilization; Program Descriptions; *Skill Development; Teaching Methods; Two Year Colleges; *Western Civilization; World Geography

ABSTRACT

The World Civilization curriculum at Tidewater Community College was redesigned to integrate basic skills with the content assignments. The targeted skills were library reference and research, geography, reading comprehension, critical analysis, grammar usage, and creative writing and thinking. During the first semester, World Civilization students were given a guided tour of the college library, where a reference guide for locating information about World Civilization was available. In order to help students develop a sense of geography, maps and a bibliography of historical atlases were distributed for each civilization studied. Supplemental exercises were developed to improve student skills and complement each study unit. The optional points earned from the supplemental tests could be used as substitutes for poor test scores. The supplemental exercises included identifying artifacts an archaeologist might discover in Egypt, discussing theories about different civilizations' religions, learning the functions of a city, and studying particular nationalities' values, traditions, and family and gender relationships. During the second semester, designed to build on the skills developed in the first semester, students read and reviewed two books from one of the historical periods studied, an exercise which helped students learn to critically evaluate while improving their reading and writing skills. The program also utilized individual conferences between the instructor and students in order to diagnose learning problems and corrective strategies and to enable the instructor to identify student interests. (WJT)

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INTEGRATING SKILLS INTO THE TEACHING OF WORLD CIVILIZATION

William A. Paquette

May 1989

TC 900 302

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William A. Paquette
Associate Professor
Tidewater Community College
Portsmouth, Virginia

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The introduction of World Civilization into the curriculum of Tidewater Community College began in 1979. World Civilization's inclusion was designed to expose students to a broader understanding of their global world, to a continuous historical pattern of cultural exchanges among civilizations and to the growing interdependence of the world's peoples. The curriculum content enables students to understand the genius of Western Civilization as it builds the nation-states of both eastern and western Europe, of Eastern Civilization as it molded the great dynasties of China and Japan, India, and the Islamic world, and of global civilization as it learned from the past to build a better future for more of the world's denizens.

The first semester's content consists of four units of study: Egypt and Mesopotamia; China, Japan, and India; Greece and Rome; and the Middle Ages. Five units are the focus of the second semester. They are the Islamic World; the Renaissance and the Reformation; the Age of Absolutism and Englightment; the Age of Revolutions: Industrial, French and Russian; and A Century of Isms: Imperialism, Capitalism, Socialism, Communism, Fascism and Nazism.

By 1985 it was apparent that teaching the content of World Civilization was increasingly handicapped by the students failure to master basic skills that normally facilitate learning. It was pointless to assign blame. Recognition of the problem was the crucial first phase. The next step was to design a World Civilization curriculum that would enable students to master the content while simultaneously integrating the important skills of library reference and research, geography, reading comprehension, critical analysis, grammer usage, and creative writing and thinking with the content assignments.

It has always been my contention that learning is not confined to the classroom, to the course syllabi and study guides or to the instructor's notes. Convincing students of the same realization continues to demand a creative sleight-of-hand. Therefore, it was essential that the students never feel the additional course work a penalty for earlier educational deficiencies. I hoped the students would perceive a series of skill exercises as an intriguing challenge and a natural extension of the learning process.

The integration of skills into World Civilization begins with a guided tour of the college library within the first three weeks of the semester. I am still amazed that some students storm the ramparts of higher education without ever searching for the riches hidden behind the library doors. The library "field

trip" acquaints students with the library's location and alerts them to an alternative resource.

A reference guide entitled "Locating Information about World Civilization" has been prepared in advance by a cooperative effort between the librarian and the instructor. The guide is restricted to volumes in the reference section. It asks and answers a series of "how to find" questions, such as "how to find information on major historical eras," "how to find copies of treaties and other historical documents," "how to find historical maps," and "how to find information about religions." Each question is then answered by listing at least one reference (with the library call numbers in parentheses) where the information can be found. The "how to find" questions are correlated to the components of civilzation studied. The components are literature, politics and government, military history, science and technology, philosophy, religion, mythology and folklore, music, art, costume, and architecture.

The librarian selects reference volumes to illustrate how to use the guide. Instruction is also given by the librarian on the Library of Congress cataloguing system, on how to use the card catalogues, and on how to use the magazine and newspaper indexes to find additional non-reference publications on topics that relate to World Civilization. Copies of the "reference guide" are distributed to each student at the end of the library tour for use during the academic year. Additional copies are kept in the library and by the instructor.

An understanding of history demands a sense of geography. Students generally skip past the maps as they read the assignments, assuming geography less important. And, yet, a civilization is better understood by studying how people cope with rivers and mountains, weather and seasonal changes and natural disasters. For each civilization studied, maps and a bibliography of historical atlases (prepared by the college librarian) are distributed. The instructor acquaints students with the proper use of an atlas and in map-reading techniques. Students need to know how climate and geography affect the rise, growth, and decline of cities and civilizations. Practice exercises prepare students for a map question on each examination.

It is a common assumption that some students will earn at least one low examination grade and seek extra-credit assignments to rectify poor test scores. Instead of approving individual and random extra-credit assignments, I have developed a series of graded exercises as supplemental activities designed to improve student skills in reading comprehension, grammar usage, critical analysis and evaluation, and creative writing and thinking. Each exercise compliments a specific unit of study. The graded exercises total 100 points. Students are informed at the beginning of the semester that they may substitute the optional

test grade for a poor score or average an additional grade with examination grades.

Archaeology and artifacts provide the background discussion for the first optional exercise encouraging creative writing and thinking skills. Students are asked to identify artifacts an archaeologist might discover on a "dig" in Egypt, Greece, China or India. They are asked to discuss what can be learned about a civilization from each item unearthed. If only one item is found, what could they deduce about the people who left it?

Using Tidewater Virginia as the exercise's locale, the scenario describes eastern Virginia as a relatively flat land except for Mt. Trashmore (which the city of Virginia Beach formed from garbage into a recreational park). This exercise asks students to return to Tidewater Virginia in the year 2576 as trained archaeologists. They find a landscape dramatically altered by the ravages of hurricanes, tornados, severe wind and ocean erosion, and by the rise of the ocean's water table. As towns and cities disappeared under the ocean's waves, the population moved to higher ground. Students are aksed to investigate the two hills (Mt. Trashmore) that remain above sea level. What published sources might an archaeologist find available in 2576 to locate relevant information about the area? Were these hills ancient burial sites? man made? As the motor launch takes them and their team to the mounds, what artifacts would they expect to find? What would these artifacts reveal about life in 20th century coastal Virginia?

As religion is the hub of the wheel of civilization, the spokes radiate the civilization's components--language, government, art, music, architecture, literature, science and technology, class systems, and military tactics. The second exercise focuses on a civilization's religion, art, technology, architecture, and literature. A study of Egypt's pyramids or the Ming tombs of China lead students into theories about religion and how various peoples tried to find theories about religion and how various peoples tried to find answers to the ageless questions of "How did I get here," "What am I to do here," and "Where do I go when I die." The second exercise asks students to create a philosophy of life and then to design their own burial chambers and to select burial items they want to take with them.

The first two exercises are designed to develop writing skills, creative thinking and interpretive skills. They are administered before the first test. These writing samples provide the instructor with the opportunity to evaluate each student's entry skills. Both exercises are used to formulate the types of essay questions that can be successfully asked on the first examination. Corrections and suggestions are shared with the students with advice on what skills need improvement.

Because civilizations are distinguished from cultures by the development of a written language, the third exercise requires a good dictionary. A list of twenty words or phrases is given to

each student. The list might deal exclusively with Greek words and phrases that have entered the English language. Just as easily prepared are lists of Latin words and phrases or French words and phrases. Students are asked to determine the original meaning for each word, its current meaning, and to use the word or phrase appropriately in a sentence. Students are challenged to add words to the list for extra points. The dictionary becomes a renewed learning tool and students are more aware that language is a legacy both evolving and borrowed.

The study of civilization is also the study of the development of cities. Court cities were shaped by the Emperor and his retainers and were important only as long as the monarch remained there. The Greek city-state added a more permanent and purposeful dimension in the evolution of cities. The "polis" or city-state became the model for the cities of western civilization. The fourth exercise in the series asks students to learn the functions of a city. Comparisons are made to cities in Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, China, and Greece. Students define or identify the terms "ecclesia," the "acropolis," the "agora," and the "amphitheater" which formed the Greek city-state and performed important functions of city-life. Once the definitions and functions for the terms are learned, students are then asked to find counterparts in the city where they currently reside. This exercise develops a good comparison and contrast response with illustrations between ancient cities and between ancient cities and those of twentieth-century America. The written response hones both essay and interpretative skills.

An effective way to understand a civilization is to project the student into its life-style. For each civilization studied, students are given a list of "perspectives" which list ways a particular nationality (such as the Chinese, the Japanese, the Indians, and the Arabs) views their world, their values and traditions, their family and gender relationships, and their religion. These perspectives are discussed in class and compared with other civilizations studied and with our own. It is important for students to develop understandings devoid of prejudice. A compare and contrast examination essay asks each student to contemplate life in another society, to evaluate how peoples share the same concerns, and to develop non-judgemental perspectives.

Two additional exercises build on the "persepctives" discussions. Because students assume that the western calendar is universally used, the fifth exercise is designed to dispel that notion by asking students to identify the year "one" for Muslims, then to name the months in the Muslim calendar and the length of each. What then follows is a list of important dates in western civilization. Students convert these dates to the Muslim calendar. Lastly, they are encouraged to identify important dates in the Islamic world and to record them on both the western and Islamic calendars.

The sixth exercise deals with the zodiac. To Americans the zodiac is an intriguing part of our daily ritual. What will the stars tell us about our future? our love life? But, the zodiac is equally important to other societies. China has a zodiac of twelve signs. Students complete an exercise that asks their zodiac sign in the west and the personality characteristics associated with it. They are to find the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac and determine how they are different from the western zodiac. Then, students are to find their Chinese zodiac sign and learn the characteristics associated with it. The exercise concludes with a compare and contrast of the zodiacs and the personality descriptions applied to them. The calendar and the zodiac exercises and the "perspectives" discussions not only develop an appreciation for and a greater empathy toward the world's diverse populations, but students must search the library to find the resources to answer the exercises questions.

A final exercise centers on the development of role models. Western standards of manhood and womanhood have been shaped by the notions of romantic love devloped during the Age of Chivalry and Courtly Love in the Middle Ages. These concepts are discussed in class and evaluated. Students learn that chivalry was participated in by only a small fraction of the total population. This exercise asks students to compare medieval role models with contemporary ones. Emphasis is placed on the validity of these models and how such images may complicate life. Comparisons are made to both the gender models and the social class systems studied in India and China and in the Islamic world. Students determine if romantic love is uniquely western. Writing and interpretive skills and critical analysis are developed with this exercise.

The end of the first semester is a time for reflection and evaluation by both the students and the instructor. Gains and growth are measured and the exercises worth is judged. Student input is valuable in shaping skill revisions and for the formulation of new exercises. At all times learning must be perceived as a reciprocal process. Students and faculty learn from each other.

The second semester of World Civilization does not include individual exercises but is designed to build on the skills developed the first semester. The second semester emphasizes the book review. Again the assistance of the college librarian is needed. The librarian and the instructor develop a bibliography of fiction and non-fiction works for each historical period in both semesters of world civilization. Students are counseled and urged to select two books--one fiction and one non-fiction--from the same historical period from either semester's work. A member of the English faculty is invited in to discuss how a book review is written and to provide guidelines on what constitutes a good review. Students are to read both books and then to review each. The semester and this exercise concludes with a short paper comparing the two works for accuracy, interest, and

knowledge. Students are learning to critically evaluate while improving their reading and writing skills. They are learning how to distinguish between the merits and defects of a work of fiction and one of non-fiction. Students are also introduced to the works of a major historian and novelist. Office hours are important for providing additional assistance to students for whom these reviews may be their first. The grade for the book reviews becomes either an optional grade to be averaged in with the examination scores or it may replace a test grade.

Content in a college course remains the primary concern for World Civilization. But skills that both enhance and transcend the discipline are of increasing importance for skill deficiency affects learning.

The success of the program discussed depends heavily upon the instructor and his/her willingness to go beyond teaching just a "litany of content." It means a commitment to using office hours as an extension of the classroom. All graded supplemental exercises are returned to the student during office hours. These individual conferences diagnose problems in learning and plot corrective strategies, encourage good, creative progress, and enable the instructor to identify and incorporate student interests into the course content. Equally vital is the cooperation given by the college library staff and the English faculty. The task is great , but by integrating skills into the content, a better equipped student emerges to accept the challenges of an education. The gains achieved in World Civilization are carried over by the students into the other disciplines. When students feel the "glow of learning" then World Civilization becomes more stimulating and rewarding to all its participants.

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JUL 05 1990